

MITCHELL HOUSE
Pleasant Hill Vicinity
Lane County
Oregon

HABS NO. OR-156

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PHOTOGRAPHS AND
WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

Historic American Buildings Survey
National Park Service
Department of the Interior
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HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY

MITCHELL HOUSE

HABS NO. OR-156

Location: Pleasant Hill Vicinity, Lane County, Oregon

Significance: The Mitchell house is thought to be one of the few remaining examples of "board wall" construction left in the United States, possibly the only example to be found in Oregon.

Description: This nineteenth century residence is a three-bay, two-story, board wall structure with an interior chimney in its gable end. Attached to the house is a root cellar constructed of 8" thick masonry wall with unusual brick coursing.

History: A Gothic Revival residence, the Mitchell house was built by Wilbur and Virginia Mitchell ca. 1880. Upon evaluation by architectural scholars, it was determined that the Mitchell residence is a very rare example of the board wall construction method, the only example of such a construction yet known in Oregon.

According to Talbot Hamlin, author of Forms and Functions of Twentieth-Century Architecture, it appears that Orson Squire Fowler invented the board wall method of construction. Fowler's significance in architectural history rests on the novelty of his concept that domestic architecture should cater to practical needs. His ideas were mirrored later in the work of architects such as Frank Lloyd Wright, who practiced the "form follows function" theory in his designs. During the mid-nineteenth century Fowler publicized his concepts by utilizing a common literary form of the day, the cottage manual. His book A Home for All or a New Cheap, Convenient and Superior Mode of Building (1848), followed the typical form of the cottage manual by describing methods and types of home construction thought to be superior aesthetically and practically. Fowler asserted that certain changes in construction would make homes more healthy, less expensive, and more attractive than traditional structures. Many subsequent "cottage builders' manuals" referenced Fowler's work.

Although Fowler's book primarily stressed changes in the **design** of homes, he also investigated new forms of home construction, including the board

wall method. According to Fowler's description, the walls of a board wall house were constructed of 1" x 4" (the size will vary) boards stacked one upon the other and staggered back and forth to allow gaps for plaster to adhere. (see figure #1) Fowler defended this construction by claiming that board wall homes were cheaper and easier to build than comparable frame structures. He also asserted that board wall homes were provided with better insulation and more effectively kept out insects. It was this board wall method which the Mitchells utilized when building their home.

Sources: Information provided by James Norman, Cultural Resource Specialist, Oregon Department of Transportation

Information provided by Philip H. Dole, Professor emeritus of Architecture, University of Oregon and Stephen Dow Beckham, Professor of History, Lewis and Clark College

Orson Fowler. The Octagon House; A Home for All. (Toronto, Canada: 1973).

Talbot Hamlin, ed. Form and Functions of Twentieth-Century Architecture, (New York: 1952)

Lynn Lewis Monroe, "American Octagons: An 1850s Building Fad with Some Surprisingly Modern Features." Early American Life. April, 1983. 45-50.

Historian: Martha V. Wagner
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Figure #1

